

5

**METHOD AND SYSTEM FOR CREATING AND MANAGING
COMMON AND CUSTOM STORAGE DEVICES
IN A COMPUTER NETWORK**

10

by
Gerald F. McBrearty
Johnny M. Shieh

15

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

1. Field of the Invention

The present invention relates in general to computer storage device management and more particularly to a method and system for creating and managing a plurality of storage devices in a computer network.

20

2. Related Art

Computer networks are widespread and vitally important in many diverse applications including business, universities and government. In general, a computer network is two or more computers (or associated devices) that are connected by communication facilities. A computer network generally includes a server, which is a computer that provides shared resources to users of the network, and a client, which is a computer that accesses the shared network resources provided by the server using the communication facilities. For example, the Internet (via the World Wide Web (WWW)) is a wide-area network (WAN) environment that enables remote clients to request and receive data located on a server.

25

30

It is common to have many different types of clients in a computer network due to differing ages and capabilities of client computers and the diversity of user needs. By way of example, a heterogeneous computer network may include client computers having different hard drive sizes, various amounts of processing power, different operating systems and applications installed. Typically, an individual server is specifically configured to meet the needs of similar client computers, so that in a heterogeneous computer network there may be several such servers.

35

5

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

15

20

30

5

10

15

20

25

30

[illegible]

FIG. 6 is a detailed flow diagram of the install method of the present invention.

FIGS. 7A and B are detailed flow diagrams of the booting method of the present invention.

FIG. 8 is a detailed flow diagram of the update method in accordance with the present invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

In the following description of the invention, reference is made to the accompanying drawings, which form a part thereof, and in which is shown by way of illustration a specific example whereby the invention may be practiced. It is to be understood that other embodiments may be utilized and structural changes may be made without departing from the scope of the present invention.

I. Introduction

The method and system of the present invention provide common and custom root storage devices for storing files on a computer network. The common root storage device stores files that are shared among several computers in the network, while the custom root storage devices store files for a specific computer. These root storage devices are created by an install method that determines what available storage devices may be used. Upon reboot, the computer network uses the common and custom root storage devices. In a preferred embodiment, multiple common root storage devices are used so that an alternate common root storage device may be updated while the primary common root storage device is in use. After updating of the alternate common root storage device, the computers in the network then boot to the alternate common root storage device while the primary common root storage device is updated.

In the present invention, the common root storage device may be located either on a local computer within the network or on a storage area network (SAN). A storage area network (SAN) is a high-speed system of shared storage devices. These storage devices are capable of storing digital data and provide each server within the network access to each storage device. Because the data is not stored directly on any of the servers within the network, the processing power of each server can be utilized for other tasks, thereby increasing network performance. In a preferred embodiment, the common and custom root storage devices are divided into volume groups (VGs). A volume group is a collection of storage devices that are treated as a single large storage

area. Each individual storage device is formatted into a physical volume (PV), and each physical volume has a name and belongs to a volume group. A volume group defines one or more logical volumes (LVs). Logical volumes are groups of information located on physical volumes. Although data on a physical volume can be discontiguous, the data on a logical volume appears to the user as contiguous. This arrangement permits file systems, paging space and other logical volumes to be resized or relocated, span multiple physical volumes and have their contents replicated for greater flexibility and availability in data storage. U.S. Patent No. 5,799,187 by Gerald McBrearty entitled "System and Method for Creating and Maintaining a CD ROM Client in a Computer Network", describes using a CD-ROM client to populate a local client hard drive.

II. Exemplary Operating Environment

As shown in FIGS. 1-8 for the purposes of illustration, the invention is embodied in method and system for managing a computer network that includes creating and managing a plurality of volume groups on the network. The following discussion is designed to provide a brief, general description of a suitable environment in which the present invention may be implemented. It should be noted that FIGS. 1 and 2 depict only one of several ways in which the present invention may be implemented. For example, those skilled in the art will appreciate that the invention may be practiced using a variety of computer systems such as, for example, personal computers (PC), server computers, hand-held devices, multiprocessor systems, microprocessor-based or programmable consumer electronics, network PCs, minicomputers and mainframe computers.

FIG. 1 illustrates a conventional hardware configuration for use with the present invention. In particular, a computer system 100 may include one or more networks, such as a local area network (LAN) 105 and 110. Each of the LANs 105, 110 includes a plurality of individual computers 115, 120, 125, 130, 135, 140, 145 and 150. The computers within the LANs 105, 110 may be any suitable computer such as, for example, a personal computer made by International Business Machines (IBM) Corporation, located in Armonk, New York. Typically, each of the plurality of individual computers is coupled to a storage device 155 (such as disk drive) that may be used to store data (such as applications) and computer-executable instructions in accordance with the present invention. Each of the plurality of individual computers also may be coupled to an output device 160 (such as a printer) for producing tangible output. The

LANs 105, 110 may be coupled via a first communication link 165 to a communication controller 170, and from the communication controller 170 through a second communication link 175 to a gateway server 180. The gateway server 180 is preferably a personal computer that serves to link the LAN 105 to the LAN 110.

5 The computer system 100 may also include a plurality of mainframe computers, such as a mainframe computer 185, which may be in communication with one or more of the LANs 105, 110 by means of a third communication link 190. The mainframe computer 185 is typically coupled to a storage device 195 that is capable of serving as a remote storage for one or more of the LANs 105, 110. Similar to the LANs 105, 110
10 discussed above, the storage device may be used to store data and computer-executable instructions in accordance with the present invention. Those skilled in the art will appreciate that the mainframe computer 185, the LAN 105 and the LAN 110 may be physically located a great distance from each other.

FIG. 2 is a block diagram of a computer used in FIG. 1 incorporating the present
15 invention and is shown for illustrative purposes only. A computer 200 includes any suitable central processing unit (CPU) 210, such as a standard microprocessor, and any number of other objects interconnected by a system bus 212. For purposes of illustration, the computer 200 includes memory such as random-access memory (RAM) 214 and read-only memory (ROM) 216 connected to the system bus 212 by an
20 input/output (I/O) adapter 218. The computer 200 also includes storage devices (such as hard disk or disk drives 220) that include a root storage device 221 thereon. As explained in detail below, if the computer 200 is a client computer then the root storage device 221 is a custom root storage device and if the computer 200 is a server computer then the root storage device 221 is a common root storage device.

25 The computer 200 further includes a display adapter 222 for connecting the system bus 212 to a suitable display device 228. In addition, a user interface adapter 236 is capable of connecting the system bus 212 to other user interface devices, such as a keyboard 240, a speaker 246, a mouse 250 and a touchpad (not shown). In a preferred embodiment, a graphical user interface (GUI) and an operating system (OS)
30 reside within a computer-readable media and contain device drivers that allow one or more users to manipulate object icons and text on the display device 228. Any suitable computer-readable media may retain the GUI and OS, such as, for example, the RAM 214, ROM 216, hard disk or disk drives 220 (such as magnetic diskette, magnetic tape, CD-ROM, optical disk or other suitable storage media).

5
10

15

20

25

#2 420. Moreover, the storage area network 400 includes a custom root storage device 460 for computer #1 410 and a custom root storage device 470 for computer #2 470. Custom root storage device 460 includes custom files #1 480 specific to computer #1 410 and custom root storage device 470 includes custom files #2 490 that are specific to computer #2 420. Although the common files 310 and the custom files 480, 490 are stored in different physical locations, both computers 480, 490 have access to the common files 310 and computer #1 410 has access to custom file #1 480 and computer #2 420 has access to custom files #2 490.

FIG. 5 is a flow diagram illustrating the general operation of the present invention. Specifically, the present invention is installed on a computer network by performing an install sequence to create a common storage device and a custom storage device (box 500). Once the install sequence is finished the present invention is installed on the computer network. The present invention determines whether the common storage device needs updating (box 510). If updating is needed, an update sequence is performed to update the common storage device (box 520). If a computer on the network is shutdown and restarted, the present invention determines that the computer is rebooting (box 530). After rebooting has occurred, a boot sequence is performed (box 540) to enable the root storage devices and ensure the present invention is operating properly.

IV. Operational Details

FIGS. 6, 7A, 7B and 8 are detailed flow diagrams illustrating a preferred embodiment of the present invention. It should be noted that the present invention may be implemented in a variety of ways and actual implementation may vary from the following description. FIG. 6 is a detailed flow diagram of the install method of the present invention used to install the present invention on a computer network. More specifically, a compact disk (CD) containing system files is used to boot (or start) a computer on the network (box 600). The present invention then discovers all storage devices (box 606) and a network administrator chooses and creates a common storage device and a custom storage device (box 612).

A volume group is then created on the custom storage device (box 618) and default logical volumes are created (box 624). Next, default file systems are created and mounted (box 630). Mounting the file systems means that the file system is made available to network computers. The common volume group is then activated (box 636)

and the default file systems from the common volume group are mounted (box 642). Next, the default file systems from the common storage devices are populated (box 648). It should be noted that the common storage devices contain all the files necessary to initially populate the custom storage devices. The computer is then rebooted (box 654), completing the installation process (box 660).

FIGS. 7A and 7B are detailed flow diagrams of the booting method of the present invention used after the computer has been rebooted. Initially, as shown in FIG. 7A, a custom root storage device is determined (box 700) and boot code from the custom root storage device is read and started (box 704). In other words, the boot code is found on the custom root storage device, loaded into memory and then activated. The custom root storage device is then activated (box 708). If the custom root storage device contains a volume group the volume group is activated along with other members of the custom root storage device. A determination is then made as to whether the activation was successful (box 712). If not, then the boot process is terminated (box 716).

Otherwise, file systems from the custom root storage device are mounted (box 720). The present invention then determines whether the mounting was successful (box 724). If the mounting failed, the boot process is terminated (box 728). If the mounting was successful, a list of common root storage devices is determined (box 732). In a preferred embodiment, the custom boot storage device will contain information about the common root storage devices that are available.

Once the list of common root storage devices is determined, these devices are activated (box 736). If the primary common root storage device contains a volume group then the volume group is also activated along with other members of the common root storage device. As shown in FIG. 7B, a determination is then made as to whether the activation was successful (box 740). It should be noted that if the primary common root storage device is marked for updating the booting method can be forced to use an alternate common root storage device. If the activation of the primary common root storage device fails, then an alternate common root storage device is chosen (box 744) and then activated (box 748). The present invention then determines whether this activation was successful (box 752). If the activation of the alternate common root storage device fails, then a determination is made to whether there are more alternate common root storage devices (box 756). If not, then the booting process is terminated (box 760). Otherwise, another alternate common root storage device is activated (box 764).

Once the primary or an alternate root storage device has been activated, the booting method mounts the file systems from the activated common root storage device (box 768). The present invention then determines whether the level of the common root storage device (primary or alternate) matches the custom root storage device level (box 772). If the two levels do not match, the operating system files of the custom root storage device are updated based on the common root storage device level (box 776). Otherwise, the booting process is completed (box 780).

FIG. 8 is a detailed flow diagram of the update method in accordance with the present invention detailing the updating of the common root storage devices. In a preferred embodiment, a plurality of common root storage devices are created such that there are primary and alternated common root storage devices (box 800). During the update process, the present invention find alternate common root storage devices (box 810) and updates them (box 820). A determination is made to whether all computers have rebooted using the alternate common root storage devices (box 830). If not, then the present invention waits for all computers using the primary common root storage device to reboot using the alternate common root storage device. If all computers have rebooted using the alternate common root storage device, the primary common root storage device is found (box 840) and updated (box 850). After updating, the present invention has all computers reboot from the updated primary common root storage device (box 860). In this manner, the updating process is completed for both the primary and alternate common root storage devices (box 870).

The foregoing description of the preferred embodiment of the invention has been presented for the purposes of illustration and description. It is not intended to be exhaustive or to limit the invention to the precise form disclosed. Many modifications and variations are possible in light of the above teaching. It is intended that the scope of the invention be limited not by this detailed description of the invention, but rather by the claims appended hereto.